

Building Self-Esteem and Resilience in the Face of Adversity: An Empirical Study on Educational Challenges and Gender-Based Violence among Women and Girls in Liberia

^{*1}Charles Gbollie, PhD; ²Diamond D. Mawiah, ³George Festus Blamoh

^{1,2} Foundation for Research, Education & Empowerment (FREE) Liberia

³Association for Life of Africa (AFLA) Liberia

^{*}Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400437>

Received: 21 March 2025; Accepted: 29 March 2025; Published: 20 May 2025

ABSTRACT

In Liberia, women and girls face significant challenges in accessing education, compounded by pervasive gender-based violence (GBV). Studies have delved into the impacts of gender-based violence on the educational attainment of women and girls, yet there are still challenges which women and girls still face. This paper purposely investigated the multifaceted challenges impeding educational access for women and girls in Liberia, focusing on the impact of GBV and its detrimental effects on self-esteem and resilience. The objectives of the study were: i) Identify and analyze barriers to education, including cultural perceptions and socioeconomic factors; ii) Assess the impact of gender-based violence on educational outcomes by investigating how various forms of gender-based violence within educational settings affect the self-esteem, resilience, and academic participation of women and girls in Liberia; and iii) Evaluate the influence and effectiveness of interventions through thorough analysis of existing legal frameworks, educational reforms, and empowerment programs. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select 58 participants, of which 51.72% were female, and 48.28% were male. The study findings showed that financial constraints, as well as early marriage and teenage pregnancy, were significant barriers to women and girls accessing education in Liberia. The study further revealed that gender-based violence, including sexual coercion and harassment within educational settings, negatively impacts the self-esteem and resilience of women and girls in Liberia. The study concludes that while notable advancements have been made in promoting girls' education and addressing GBV in Liberia, more comprehensive and sustained efforts are required to close the existing gaps and ensure equal opportunities for women and girls.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, academic participation, barriers, self-esteem, resilience

INTRODUCTION

In Liberia, women and girls face significant challenges in accessing education, compounded by pervasive gender-based violence (GBV). The education system is hindered by high rates of violence against children, especially girls, with one in five students experiencing abuse from teachers or staff (IFRC, 2024). Additionally, two in five Liberian women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner (Cunningham, Gupta, & De Silva, 2023). These adversities do not only impede educational attainment but also adversely affect self-esteem and resilience, further entrenching cycles of poverty and inequality in Liberia.

Educational attainment is vital for empowering women and girls, providing them with the knowledge and skills to make informed life decisions. For instance, higher levels of education enable women and girls to influence healthcare choices and assert their rights, including the ability to refuse unwanted sexual advances. These competencies are essential for maintaining sexual, reproductive, and emotional health (Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen & Onagoruwa, 2018). Addressing barriers to education and combating GBV can support women and

girls in building their self-esteem and resilience. This, in turn, contributes to cultivating a more equitable society where they can fully thrive and realize their full potential.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to investigate the multifaceted challenges impeding educational access for women and girls in Liberia, focusing on the pervasive impact of GBV and its detrimental effects on self-esteem and resilience. By examining the interplay between cultural norms, socioeconomic barriers, and GBV within educational settings, the research seeks to identify root causes hindering female educational attainment. The ultimate goal is to propose evidence-based strategies that enhance educational opportunities and empower Liberian women and girls to overcome adversity, fostering a more equitable and supportive environment for their personal and academic growth.

Research Objectives

1. Identify and analyze educational barriers by examining the primary obstacles, including cultural perceptions and socioeconomic factors, that prevent Liberian women and girls from accessing vocational training and higher education.
2. Assess the impact of gender-based violence on educational outcomes by investigating how various forms of gender-based violence within educational settings affect the self-esteem, resilience, and academic participation of women and girls in Liberia.
3. Evaluate the influence and effectiveness of interventions through a thorough analysis of existing legal frameworks, educational reforms, and empowerment programs aimed at enhancing educational access, building resilience and self-esteem, and reducing gender-based violence.

Core Research Questions

1. What are the primary obstacles, including cultural and socioeconomic factors, preventing Liberian women and girls from accessing education?
2. How do prevalent forms of gender-based violence within educational settings influence the self-esteem, resilience, and academic participation of females in Liberia?
3. How effective are existing legal frameworks, educational reforms, and empowerment programs in Liberia aimed at enhancing educational access, building resilience and self-esteem, and reducing gender-based violence against women?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the multifaceted issues hindering the progress of women and girls in Liberia. The insights gained will inform policies and programs designed to foster a more equitable and empowering environment, ultimately enhancing self-esteem and resilience among Liberian females.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Gender-based violence remains a critical issue in Liberia, identified by citizens as the foremost women's rights challenge (Afrobarometer, 2023). Despite legislative efforts like the 2019 Domestic Violence Act and the declaration of rape as a national emergency in 2020 (Al Jazeera, 2020), GBV persists due to entrenched social norms and post-conflict societal fractures. This study examines barriers to education, the impact of GBV on educational outcomes, and the influence and effectiveness of interventions and empowerment programs contextualized within Liberia's socio-political landscape.

Barriers to Education

Education in Liberia faces numerous challenges that hinder its development and accessibility. These barriers can be categorized into primary obstacles, cultural perceptions, and socio-economic factors. These barriers

particularly impact women and girls' educational attainment. The consequences of a protracted conflict have left an indelible mark on educational infrastructure and access. Limited resources and a lack of psychosocial support systems exacerbate vulnerability among adolescent girls, making them susceptible to trauma and gender-based violence, which in turn stifles their academic potential. As highlighted in recent research, addressing these complexities requires focusing on educational institutions and understanding the barriers to social determinants of education.

Research findings have named the lack of adequate infrastructure (sanitary facilities, classrooms, and safe drinking water) as one of the primary barriers to education in Liberia (Waydon, Ying, & Ketter, 2020). Infrastructure is one of the critical barriers to education in Liberia and the world at large. According to Sumaworo (2023), poor educational infrastructure in Liberia has not only affected the quality of teaching and learning but also discouraged attendance and reduced retention. Studies showed that the lack of proper facilities makes it difficult for teachers to create a conducive learning environment, which can lead to innovation and effective teaching and learning. Researchers in Liberia have attributed the teacher shortage in various schools to low salaries and poor working conditions, which are some of the primary obstacles to education (Hinneah & Tekay, 2023). UNESCO (2022) found inadequate funding as a major contributor to Liberia's educational sector's challenges.

The Liberian education system faces various obstacles to which cultural perceptions and socio-cultural norms contribute significantly to the challenges women and girls face in accessing education (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014). Cultural perceptions and socio-cultural norms do not only impede the educational attainment of women and girls in Liberia but also limit educational opportunities (Ndagurwa, 2025). For instance, in some communities, women and girls are expected to take on domestic responsibilities such as cooking, caring for young siblings, and cleaning. Early marriages and other traditional norms against women have impeded the education of many women in Liberia. According to a study, early marriage and the expectation that girls should start their families at a very young age have reduced the perceived value of investing in their education.

Sumaworo (2023) further added that poverty is a significant socio-economic barrier to education in Liberia. Many families struggle to afford school-related expenses, such as uniforms and supplies, despite primary education being officially free. Economic hardships also contribute to the barriers faced by the education sector. According to a UNESCO (2022) report, a high poverty rate means that children often need to work to support their families, reducing school attendance. Additionally, Waydon et al. (2020), even though the government has put into place free and compulsory education, there are hidden costs such as transportation, learning materials like textbooks, asserted pens, book bags, and money for lunch on campus among the barriers to education.

Addressing barriers to education in Liberia requires a comprehensive approach involving government action, community involvement, civil society groups, private institutions, and international support. By understanding and addressing primary obstacles, cultural perceptions, and socio-economic factors, Liberia can improve its education system and ensure that all children have access to quality education.

Impact of Gender-based Violence

Globally, gender-based violence has been recognised as a violation of fundamental human rights. The United Nations defines gender-based violence as any act of violence that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, girls, men, or boys, as well as threats such acts, coercion, or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty (United Nations, 2006). According to the Afro barometer's report, GBV remains a critical issue in Liberia, and citizens have identified it as the foremost women's rights challenge. A Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geoinformation Services survey report states that 60% of women aged 15 – 49 have experienced physical violence, one form of GBV, and 9% have experienced sexual violence, another form of GBV. These various reports on GBV have impacted the educational attainment of women and girls in Liberia. According to a report by Plan International, the most prevalent forms of GBV found in schools are sexual harassment by teachers ("sex for grades") and peer violence in schools, which is widespread in Liberia. The 2020 report by Plan International highlights critical issues regarding sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

Influence and effectiveness of interventions

Liberia, as a state, has signed numerous national and international laws aimed at protecting women and girls against any form of discriminatory actions, as well as gender-based violence. In the fight against GBV, the gender policy called the Judiciary Branch Strategic Gender Policy 2019 was put into place to protect the rights of women and girls against any form of GBV (USAID, 2012, Ministry of Justice, 2019). Women and girls' empowerment programs and gender equality have been universally recognised as core development objectives, fundamental for realising justice and human rights, and the key to effective and sustainable development. Many policies and reforms in Liberia have been put into place to combat the critical stems of GBV against women. Some of the most prominent ones are the Education Reform Act of 2011, the Domestic Violence Act of 2019, the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (NAP-WPS 2020-2022), and the National Policy on Girls Education, among others.

These policies and reforms provide rich strategies for the protection of women against GBV. However, reports indicate that a significant number of women still suffer the impact of school-related gender-based violence, which has prevented them from continuing school.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection to obtain comprehensive stakeholder insights.

Participants

Participants in this study were intentionally selected through purposive sampling based on their expertise or active engagement in gender equality and women's empowerment across various sectors. This approach was chosen to ensure the inclusion of diverse and informed perspectives directly relevant to the study's objectives. Data was collected from 58 participants representing various age groups, professional backgrounds, and educational levels.

The demographic profile of these participants provides essential context for interpreting the study's findings. It helps assess the relevance, depth, and reliability of their insights regarding women's education and GBV in Liberia. The detailed demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of participants

No	Variable	Description	(n=28)	%
1	Gender	Female	30	51.72
		Male	28	48.28
2	Age group	41 or above	21	36.21
		33-40	20	34.48
		26-32	13	22.41
		20-25	3	5.17
		15-19	1	1.72
3	Marital Status	Married	29	50
		Single	27	46.55
		Divorced/Separated	2	3.45

4	Highest Level of Education Attained	Higher education (college/university)	55	94.83
		Primary education	1	1.72
		Vocational training	1	1.72
		Secondary education	1	1.72
5	Employment Status	Employed	37	63.79
		Unemployed	9	15.52
		Self-employed	6	10.34
		Student	6	10.34
6	Current Occupation	Educator	32	55.17
		Other (please specify)_	11	18.97
		Social Worker	10	17.24
		Nurse	4	6.9
		Doctor	1	1.72

The demographic information shows that the study sample was pretty balanced in gender and included participants from various age groups, with a strong representation of individuals aged 33 and above. Most respondents were married and highly educated, with 94.83% having attained higher education at the college or university level. Employment was relatively high, with over 63% employed, and the dominant profession was educators, followed by social workers.

These demographic characteristics suggest the respondents were well-positioned to provide informed perspectives on women's education, gender-based violence, and empowerment initiatives in Liberia. The diversity in age and professional background also adds depth to the study's findings, ensuring that the insights reflect a broad cross-section of knowledgeable individuals engaged in relevant sectors.

Data Collection Tools

The study employed a structured survey questionnaire as its primary research tool. The survey was carefully designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data, incorporating closed-ended and open-ended questions. This mixed approach allowed the researchers to collect measurable data while capturing detailed insights and personal experiences from participants.

The survey focused on four key areas:

- **Identifying Barriers to Education:** The survey explored the primary obstacles—such as cultural perceptions, financial constraints, early marriage, and other socioeconomic factors—that hinder Liberian women and girls from accessing vocational training and higher education.
- **Examining the Impact of Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Questions were designed to assess how various forms of GBV within educational settings affect the self-esteem, resilience, and academic participation of women and girls in Liberia. Respondents shared observations and experiences, shedding light on the prevalence and consequences of GBV.
- **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Interventions:** The survey evaluated the influence of existing legal frameworks, educational reforms, and community-based initiatives to improve educational access and

address gender-based violence. It gathered participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of these interventions in reducing barriers and supporting survivors.

- **Soliciting Recommendations for Gender Equality and Empowerment:** Open-ended questions invited participants to suggest innovative strategies and approaches to promote gender equality and empower women and girls. This provided an opportunity to capture community-driven ideas and solutions relevant to the Liberian context.

By utilizing this structured survey instrument, the study obtained a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions concerning women's education and gender-based violence in Liberia.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered primarily through closed-ended survey questions, was analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical methods were applied to summarise and interpret the data. Key statistical measures such as frequencies, percentages, and distribution trends were generated to provide a clear overview of participants' responses across various indicators. This analysis helped to quantify key findings related to barriers to education, the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence, the effectiveness of legal and educational interventions, and levels of satisfaction with current empowerment efforts.

The qualitative data, collected through open-ended responses, was transcribed and analyzed. It mostly informed participants' suggestions of innovative strategies and approaches to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the assessment at any time. The study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participant welfare and ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This session presents key findings of the study, which explored barriers to women and girls' access to education in Liberia, the impact of gender-based violence on their educational experiences, and the effectiveness of existing interventions. Mainly using descriptive statistical analysis, findings provide valuable insights into the challenges faced and highlight opportunities for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls in education.

Barriers to Education for Women and Girls

This study examines key barriers preventing Liberian women and girls from accessing education in Liberia. Using descriptive statistics, we analyzed responses to assess the impact of cultural perceptions, financial constraints, gender-based violence, and early marriage on educational opportunities. The findings provide insight into the prevalence of these challenges, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to promote gender equity in education.

The study found that 53.45% of respondents cited financial constraints as the most significant barrier to women and girls accessing education in Liberia. This was followed by early marriage and teenage pregnancy, which accounted for 31.03%. Additionally, 60.34% of participants indicated that financial constraints most often prevent women and girls in their area from pursuing education. Figure 1 presents a detailed breakdown of these responses.

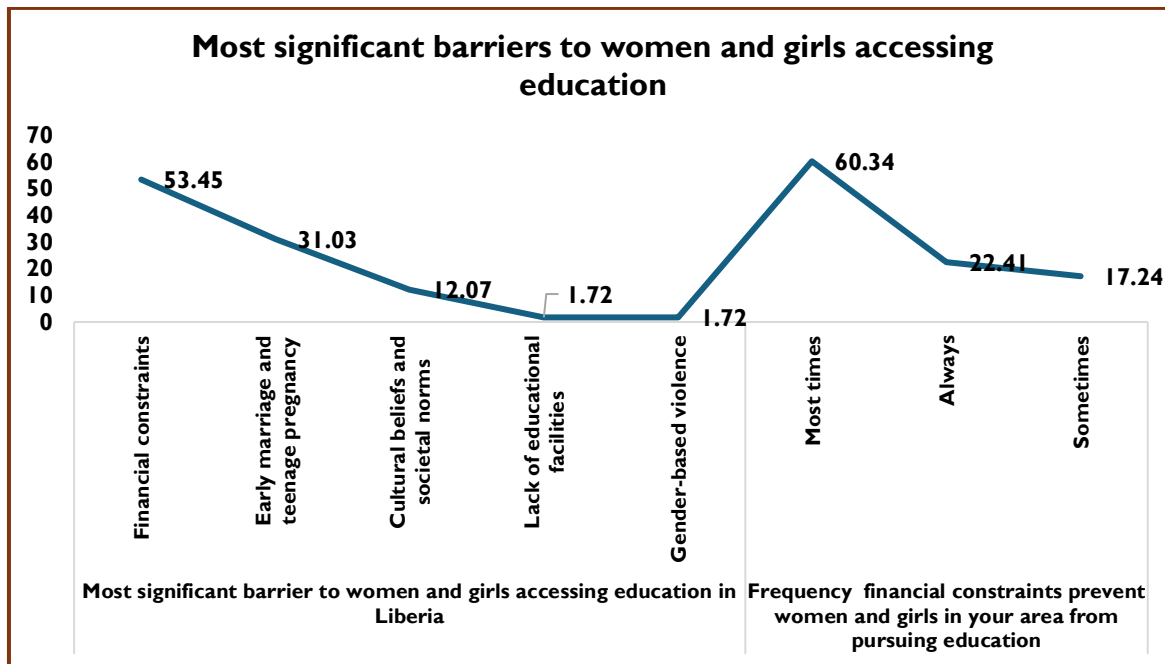


Figure 1. Most significant barriers to women and girls accessing education

According to Figure1, financial constraints remain the most significant barrier to women and girls accessing education, with over 60% of respondents believing it is a frequent hindrance. This finding underscores the critical need for increased financial empowerment opportunities, such as scholarships, grants, and vocational training support, to help women and girls overcome these economic challenges and pursue their education successfully.

Furthermore, the study examined respondents' views on the statement: "In my community, it is commonly believed that educating boys is more important than educating girls," the percentage of women and girls with access to scholarships or financial aid for education, and the typical age at which girls in the community get married. According to the results presented in Table 2, these three factors remain significant barriers to women's and girls' education in Liberia, reinforcing the need for targeted interventions to promote gender equality in education access.

Table 2. Three factors remain significant barriers to women's and girls' education in Liberia

No	Variable	Description	(n=28)	%
1	To what extent do you agree with the statement: "In my community, it is commonly believed that educating boys is more important than educating girls"	Strongly Disagree	22	37.93
		Disagree	20	34.48
		Neutral	7	12.07
		Agree	6	10.34
		Strongly agree	3	5.17
2	About what percentage of women and girls in your community have access to scholarships or financial aid for education?	0-10%	15	25.86
		Not sure.	9	15.52
		11-25%	2	3.45

		51-75%	2	3.45
		26-50%	1	1.72
3	At what age do girls in your community typically get married?	Varies widely	36	62.07
		19-22 year	9	15.52
		15-18 years	8	13.79
		23 years	4	6.9
		Under 15 years	1	1.72

Table 2 reveals that just over 70% of respondents no longer subscribe to the belief that "*educating boys is more important than educating girls.*" However, over 15% still hold this view, which remains a concern, especially given that most participants have attained higher education.

Additionally, 25.86% of respondents indicated that only 0-10% of females in their communities have access to scholarship opportunities, highlighting a major financial barrier to education. Furthermore, over 60% of respondents believe that the average age of marriage varies widely, suggesting the ongoing influence of early marriage on educational attainment. These findings underscore the need for continued advocacy and financial support to improve access to education for women and girls in Liberia.

As part of our effort to better understand the barriers to women's and girls' education in Liberia, the study also examined the prevalence of gender-based violence in educational settings. Respondents were asked: "*In the past year, did you hear or observe any reported cases of gender-based violence in an educational setting within your community? If yes, how many cases?*"

A striking **62.07%** of respondents reported hearing about or experiencing **1-2 cases** of GBV within the last year. This finding highlights the persistent threat of GBV in educational environments, which can significantly deter women and girls from pursuing their education. See Figure 2 for detailed responses.

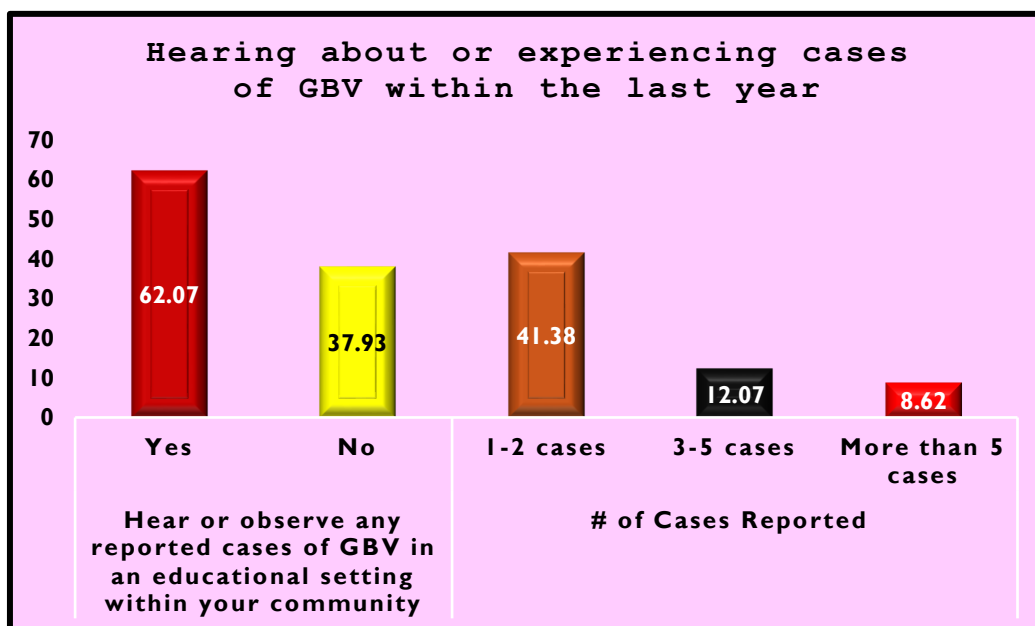


Figure 2 Respondents reported hearing about or experiencing cases of GBV within the last year

Figure 2 points out an alarming statistic of 62.07% of respondents hearing about or experiencing 1-2 cases of GBV within the last year. The finding underscores the ongoing threat of GBV in educational environments, which can discourage female participation in education and create unsafe learning conditions. Addressing this issue

requires stronger policies, community engagement, and protective measures to ensure a safe and inclusive educational space for women and girls.

Impact of Gender-based Violence on Education

This section examines the impact of GBV on educational outcomes for women and girls in Liberia. Using descriptive statistics, the study analyses how various forms of GBV affect self-esteem, resilience, and academic participation. Findings highlight the prevalence of GBV in educational settings and its detrimental effects while also assessing the potential of gender sensitivity training for educators to foster a safer learning environment.

In exploring the impact of gender-based violence, the study inquired: *“Which forms of gender-based violence have you observed or experienced in educational settings?”* and *“To what extent has the threat or experience of gender-based violence affected others or your educational participation?”*

Sexual coercion (e.g., sex for grades) was reported as the highest form of harassment, with 60.34% of respondents identifying it as a significant issue. Furthermore, 43.1% of participants stated that gender-based violence has significantly decreased their own or others’ participation in education. These findings highlight the profound implications of GBV on educational engagement and the need for effective preventive measures. See Table 3 for detailed responses.

Table 3 GBV impact on educational engagement of women and girls in Liberia

No	Variable	Description	(n=28)	%
1	Which forms of gender-based violence have you observed or experienced in educational settings?	Sexual coercion (e.g., sex for grades)	35	60.34
		Sexual harassment	29	50
		Verbal harassment	28	48.28
		Physical assault	15	25.86
		Other (please specify)	1	1.72
2	To what extent has the threat or experience of gender-based violence affected others or your educational participation?	Significantly decreased participation	25	43.1
		Moderately decreased participation	22	37.93
		Moderately increased participation	6	10.34
		No effect	3	5.17
		Significantly increased participation	2	3.45

According to Table 3, sexual coercion (e.g., sex for grades), **sexual harassment**, and **verbal harassment** remain highly prevalent in Liberia, with **50% or more** of respondents reporting that they have either observed or experienced these forms of gender-based violence within the education sector. Correspondingly, about **80%** of respondents indicated that GBV is **significantly or moderately** decreasing women’s and girls’ participation in educational activities. Addressing this issue remains a critical priority in an effort to reduce educational disparities and create safer, more inclusive learning environments for women and girls in Liberia.

One key concern investigated was whether gender-based violence impacts the self-esteem of female students. Nearly **95%** of respondents agreed that it does have a negative effect. In addressing this issue, over **98%** of respondents proposed that **training educators and staff on gender sensitivity and violence prevention** can significantly enhance the resilience of female students as presented in Figure 4.2.

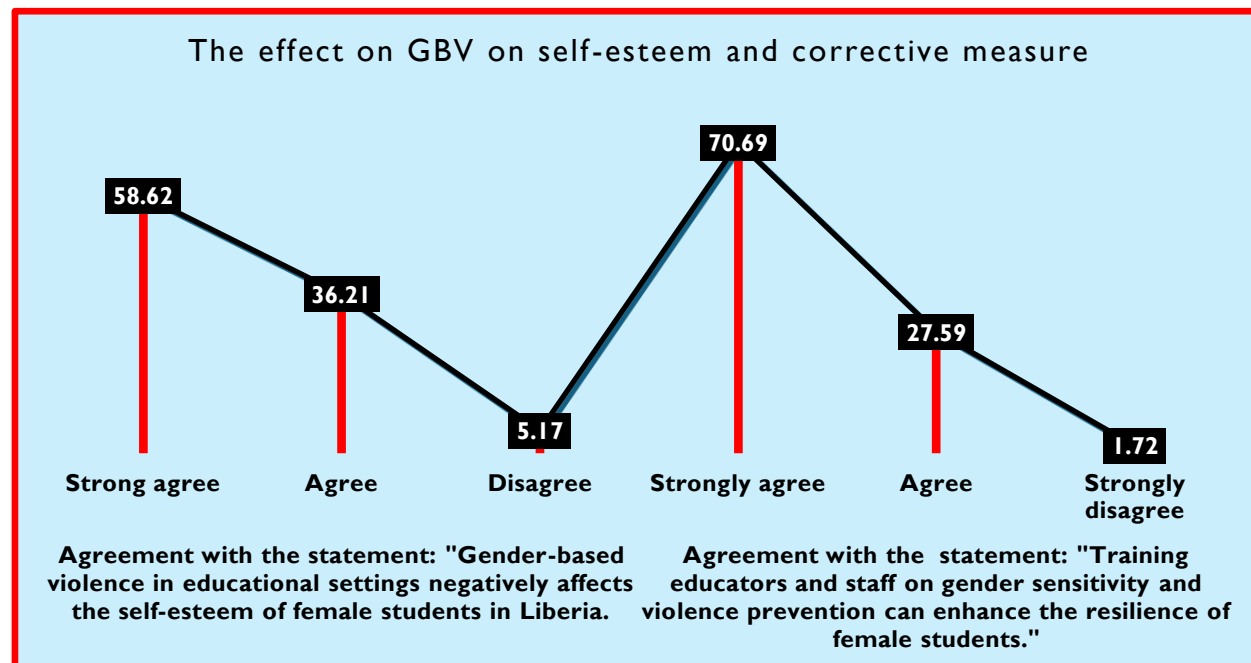


Figure 2 The negative effect of GBV on female students' self-esteem and training educators and staff on gender sensitivity and violence prevention as corrective mechanism

Figure 2 uncovers a statistically significant effect, with **95%** of respondents confirming that gender-based violence negatively impacts the education of women and girls. Furthermore, **98%** of respondents proposed that training educators and staff on **gender sensitivity and violence prevention** is a key strategy to address this issue. They believe such training can significantly enhance the **resilience** of female students. These findings underscore the critical importance of implementing targeted interventions to foster supportive, safe, and inclusive educational environments for women and girls in Liberia.

Influence and effectiveness of interventions

This section evaluates the influence and effectiveness of interventions aimed at enhancing educational access, reducing gender-based violence, and promoting women's empowerment in Liberia. Using descriptive statistics, the analysis examines respondents' perceptions of current legal frameworks, educational reforms, and empowerment programs. The findings provide insight into the progress made and highlight areas where further action is needed to support women and girls in education and safeguard their rights.

In assessing the effectiveness of existing interventions, the study first inquired: *"To what extent do you agree with the statement: 'The current legal frameworks in Liberia are effective in preventing and addressing gender-based violence against women and girls?'"* and whether *"recent educational reforms in Liberia have led to an increase in female enrollment and retention."*

The results revealed **mixed views**, with around **50%** of respondents agreeing that the current legal frameworks are effective in preventing and addressing gender-based violence. In contrast, a **relatively higher percentage** believed that recent educational reforms have contributed to an increase in female enrollment and retention. See Figure 3.

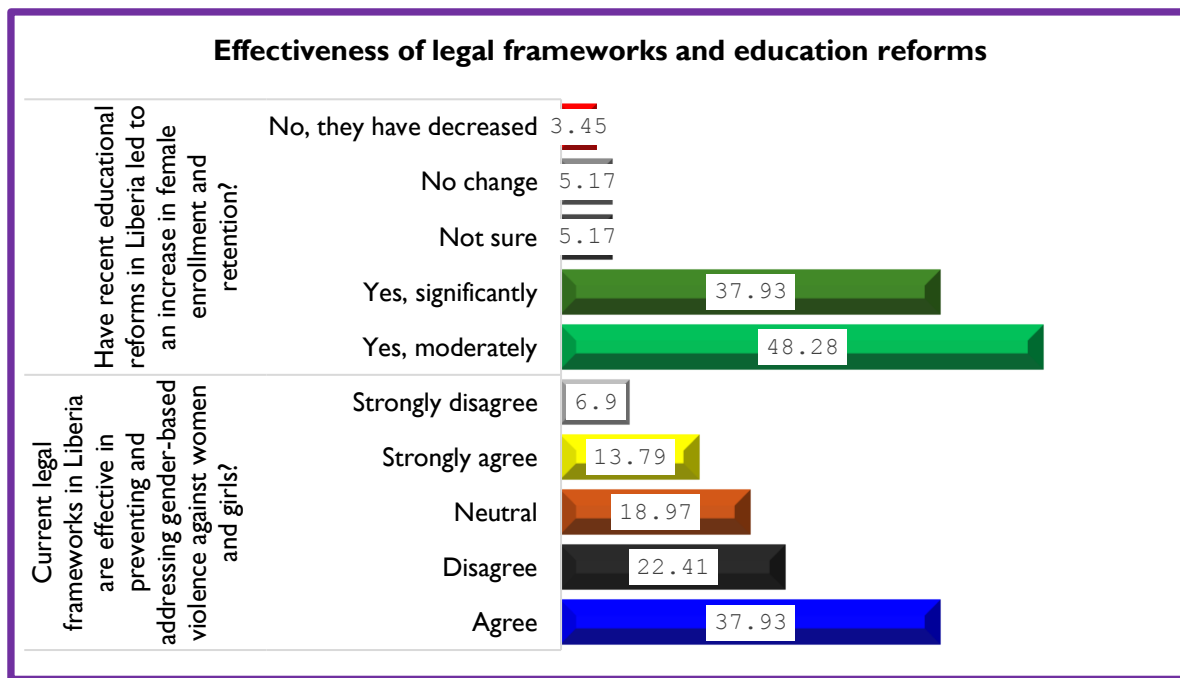


Figure 3. The effectiveness of current legal frameworks in preventing and addressing GBV and recent educational reforms' contribution to female enrollment and retention

The results presented in Figure 3 highlight that more needs to be done to strengthen the effectiveness of current legal frameworks, with only 50% of respondents believing they are effective in preventing and addressing in Liberia. While 85% of respondents agreed that recent educational reforms have contributed to an increase in female enrollment and retention, nearly 50% rated this contribution as only *moderately significant*. These findings suggest that, to ensure sustained improvement in the enrollment and retention of women and girls, there is a need for not only policy development but also full and effective implementation of those policies.

Further, the study explored whether respondents were aware of any empowerment programs or initiatives that have successfully reduced gender-based violence and supported survivors, as well as how well these programs contribute to building resilience and self-esteem among women and girls. The findings, presented in **Figures 4 and 5**, provide insights into the perceived effectiveness and impact of these initiatives in fostering safer educational environments and empowering female students in Liberia.

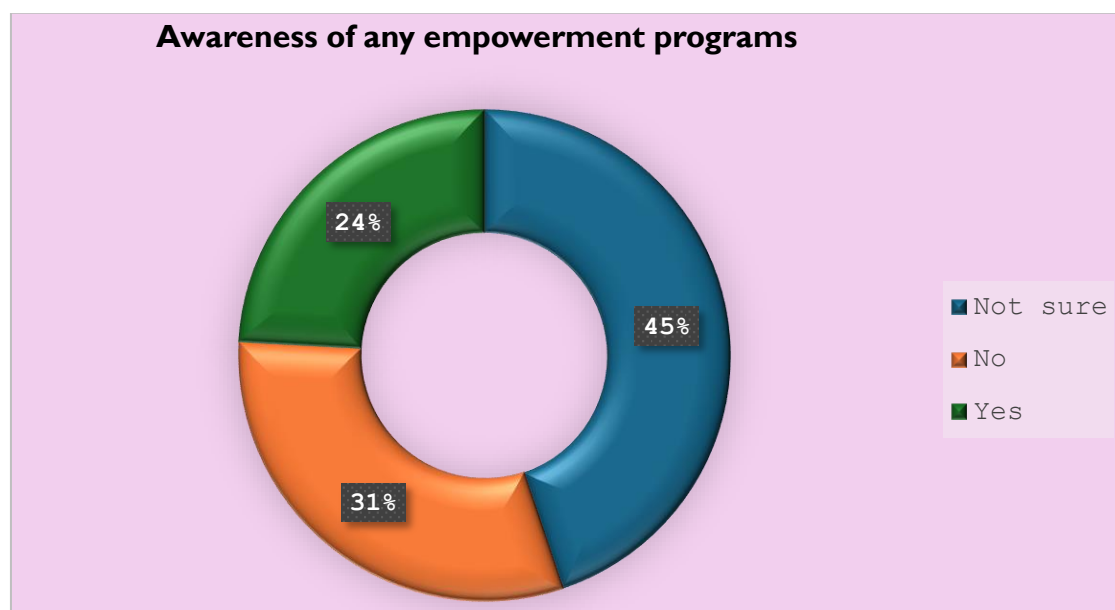


Figure 4. Respondents' awareness of any empowerment programs or initiatives that have successfully reduced GBV and supported survivors

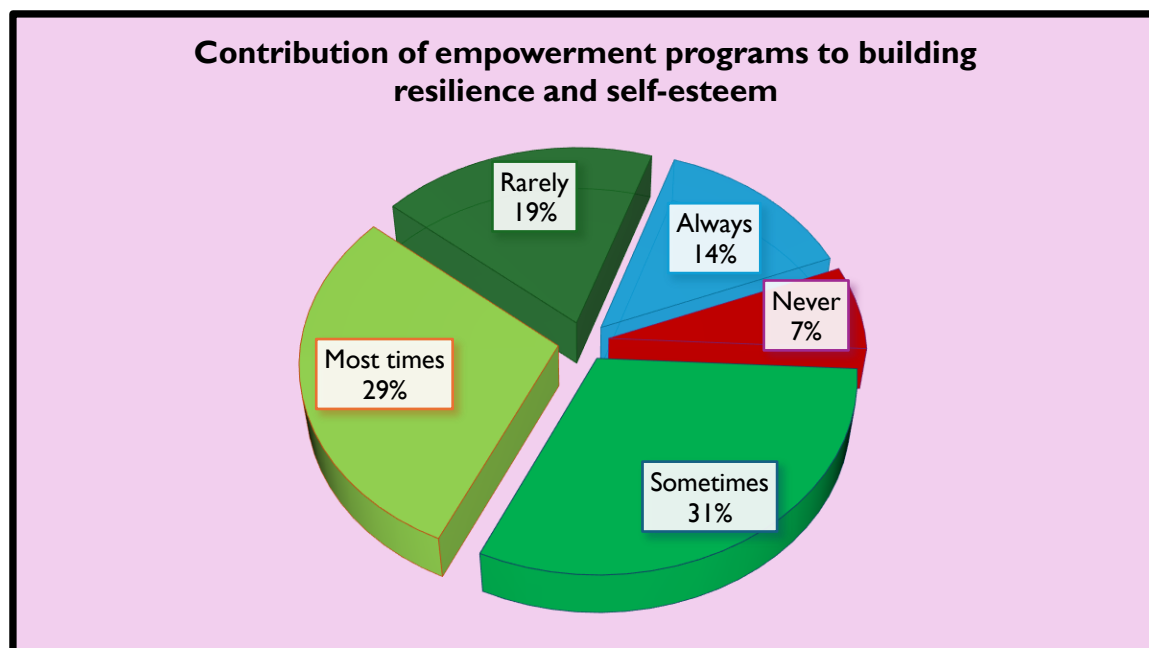


Figure 5 Respondents' perception about well do empowerment programs contribute to building resilience and self-esteem among women and girls

The findings in Figure 4 show that only 24% of participants are aware of any empowerment programs or initiatives that have successfully reduced GBV and supported survivors in Liberia, while the remaining respondents either indicated "no" or "not sure." This suggests that awareness of such interventions remains relatively low and that the reach or visibility of existing programs may be limited.

Additionally, Figure 5 reveals that about 60% of respondents perceive empowerment programs as contributing to building resilience and self-esteem among women and girls. This indicates that, while existing programs show potential to boost resilience and self-esteem, there is still significant room to expand and strengthen these initiatives across Liberia.

As a general conclusive inquiry, the study sought to determine how satisfied respondents are with current efforts regarding women's empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence in Liberia. The results indicate moderate satisfaction, with a little over 50% of respondents reporting that they are satisfied or very satisfied with these efforts. See Figure 6 for detailed responses.

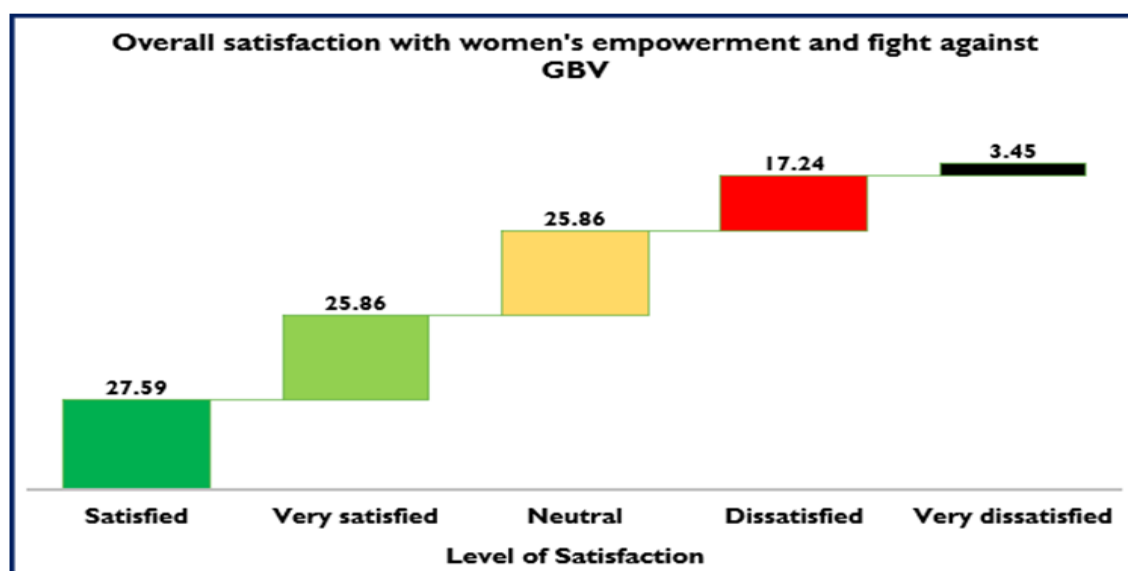


Figure 6. Respondents' overall satisfaction with current efforts regarding women's empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence in Liberia

According to Figure 6, over 20% of respondents reported being either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with current efforts regarding women's empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) in Liberia. Additionally, nearly 26% of respondents selected "neutral," indicating ambivalence and highlighting that the challenges surrounding women's empowerment and GBV prevention remain far from resolved. While some progress has been noted, as reflected in other parts of the study, these findings emphasize that considerable work is still needed to improve satisfaction levels and enhance the overall effectiveness of initiatives aimed at empowering women and combating GBV in Liberia.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study explored the key barriers to education for women and girls in Liberia, the impact of GBV on their educational outcomes, and the influence and effectiveness of existing interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. The findings reveal several persistent challenges:

- **Financial constraints** are the most significant barrier to women and girls accessing vocational training and higher education, followed by **early marriage** and **teenage pregnancy**.
- **Gender-based violence**, including sexual coercion and harassment, remains prevalent within educational settings, negatively impacting self-esteem, resilience, and academic participation. Nearly 95% of respondents confirmed that GBV harms female students' educational experiences.
- While recent **educational reforms** have contributed to an increase in female enrollment and retention, the perceived impact of current **legal frameworks** addressing GBV is limited, with only half of the respondents rating them as effective.
- Awareness and availability of **empowerment programs** that reduce GBV and support survivors remain low, though existing initiatives are perceived to have some positive impact on resilience and self-esteem.
- Satisfaction with current efforts toward women's empowerment and combating GBV is moderate, indicating progress has been made but significant gaps remain.

Overall, the study concludes that while there have been notable advancements in promoting girls' education and addressing GBV in Liberia, more comprehensive and sustained efforts are required to close the existing gaps and ensure equal opportunities for women and girls.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following **practical, action-oriented recommendations** are proposed for policymakers, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders:

1. Expand Financial Support Mechanisms

- **Increase scholarships, grants, and financial aid** programs specifically targeting women and girls, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Partner with private sector organizations, NGOs, and international donors to **mobilize resources** for sustainable funding of girls' education initiatives.

2. Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Enforcement

- Review and **strengthen existing laws and policies** addressing GBV in educational settings, ensuring strict enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

- Establish **independent oversight bodies** to monitor and respond to GBV cases in schools and vocational training centers.

3. Intensify Community Awareness and Advocacy

- Implement **community-based awareness campaigns** to challenge cultural norms and beliefs that prioritize boys' education over girls'.
- Engage **traditional leaders, parents, and community influencers** to promote the importance of girls' education and discourage early marriage and gender discrimination.

4. Enhance Gender Sensitivity and GBV Prevention Training

- Mandate **comprehensive gender sensitivity and GBV prevention training** for educators, school administrators, and support staff.
- Develop and implement **clear reporting and response mechanisms** within schools to ensure swift and confidential handling of GBV cases.

5. Scale Up and Publicize Empowerment Programs

- **Expand the reach** of empowerment programs aimed at supporting survivors of GBV and building the resilience and self-esteem of women and girls.
- Improve **communication and public awareness** about existing programs to increase accessibility and participation.

6. Improve Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability

- Establish a **national database** to track enrollment, retention, and dropout rates of girls in education, as well as GBV incidents in schools.
- Conduct regular **impact assessments** of legal frameworks, educational reforms, and empowerment programs to ensure continuous improvement.

7. Foster Multi-Sectoral Collaboration

- Promote **collaboration between government ministries**, NGOs, schools, healthcare providers, and justice systems to provide comprehensive support services for survivors of GBV.
- Encourage **public-private partnerships** to invest in education infrastructure and create safe, gender-responsive learning environments.

8. Address Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy

- Enforce laws against **child marriage** and provide **sexual and reproductive health education** to empower girls with knowledge about their rights and health.
- Support **re-entry programs** for teenage mothers, enabling them to return to school or access vocational training.

Implementing these recommendations requires a **coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach** that addresses both systemic barriers and cultural norms. With sustained commitment and strategic action, Liberia can make significant strides toward ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all women and girls, while effectively addressing gender-based violence and fostering a culture of respect and empowerment.

Conflict of Interest: The authors have no potential conflicts of interest.

Data Availability: The data for this is available upon requested.

Appreciation Note

The Foundation for Research, Education and Empowerment (FREE) Liberia extends its profound gratitude to the Association for Life of Africa (AFLA) Liberia, under the dedicated leadership of Ambassador George Festus Blamoh (Country Director), for their invaluable guidance and unwavering support throughout this research initiative on gender equality and women's empowerment in Liberia. Your partnership and encouragement were instrumental in the successful completion of this study.

FREE is also deeply honored for the opportunity to share the findings of this important work with key stakeholders, including at the world's highest platform, CSW69 – 2025, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. We believe this opportunity will significantly contribute to advancing global conversations and actions toward gender equality.

Special appreciation goes to our committed team at FREE. Heartfelt thanks to our capable Team Leader, Dr. Charles Gbollie, and our dedicated colleagues Philip Y. Kollee, I, Dennis R. Nimely, Girlee W. Moore, along with other passionate members of the FREE Liberia staff. Your time, expertise, and unwavering support were pivotal to the success of this study.

Together, we strive for a Liberia where every woman and girl has equal access to education, opportunity, and empowerment.

About Us

Founded in July 2015, FREE Liberia is a registered and accredited NGO committed to fostering evidence-based solutions for long-term impact. Our organization consists of innovative researchers, academicians, and professionals in Liberia and abroad, dedicated to conducting systematic research that informs interventions in public and private institutions. We leverage empirical research to drive quality education and empowerment initiatives, ensuring long-lasting societal transformation and development.

Our Vision: To become a premier institution that creates opportunities for evidence-driven interventions, quality education, and an inspired life for everyone. **Our Mission:** To conduct systematic research that informs quality education and effective service delivery while empowering communities, institutions, and individuals to maximize their full potential.

REFERENCES

1. Afrobarometer. (2023). Gender-based violence tops women's right issues in Liberia.
2. Al Jazeera. (2020). Liberia declares rape a national emergency after spike in cases. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com>.
3. Bentley-Edwards, K. L., & Adams, V. N. (2024). I am not (your) superwoman, Black girl magic, or beautiful struggle: Rethinking the resilience of Black women and girls. *American Psychologist*, 79(8), 1036–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001304>
4. Cunningham, W., Gupta, S., & De Silva, S. J. (2023). An assessment of gender gaps in Liberia through a women's empowerment lens. world bank group. Worldbank.org. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/bbbc1b1d-7786-4ef2-a587-f73abfb06307/full>
5. Davies, S. E., & True, J. (2017). Connecting the Dots: Pre-existing Patterns of Gender Inequality and the Likelihood of Widespread and Systematic Sexual Violence. *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 9(1), 65–85. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984x-00901005>
6. Hinneh, J., & Tekay, M. (2023). Overage enrolment and repetition in schools: Implication of free and compulsory basic education in Liberia. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 13, 10–16. <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1303041016>
7. IFRC. (2024). PREVENTING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE in Liberian schools CASE STUDY 2024. <https://pgi.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2024->

- 07/ifrc_casestudies_preventing-sgbv-in-schools-in-liberia_web_en_1.pdf
8. Ministry of Justice. (2019). Judiciary Branch Strategic Gender Policy 2019 - 2023.
 9. MOE. (2021). Ministry of Education National Policy on Girls' Education. Republic of Liberia.
 10. Ndagurwa, N. T. (2025). Gender inequality from a cultural perspective - right for education. Right for Education. <https://rightforeducation.org/2025/01/13/gender-inequality-from-a-cultural-perspective/>
 11. Palermo, T., Bleck, J., & Peterman, A. (2014). Tip of iceberg: Reporting gender-based violence in developing countries. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 179(5), 602–612.
 12. Steiner, J. J., Johnson, L., Postmus, J. L., & Davis, R. (2018). Sexual Violence of Liberian School Age Students: An Investigation of Perpetration, Gender, and Forms of Abuse. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2018.1549176>
 13. Sumaworo, M. (2023). Challenges of higher education in Liberia and possible solutions. *Journal of Asian and African Social Science and Humanities*, 9(1), 22–33. <https://doi.org/10.55327/jaash.v9i1.298>
 14. UNESCO. (2022). Education sector analysis: Republic of Liberia. Unesco.org. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383314>
 15. United Nations. (2006). Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. New York.
 16. USAID. (2012). Gender equality and female empowerment.
 17. Waydon, E. B., Ying, L., & Ketter, B. L. (2020). Free and Compulsory Primary Education Policy in Liberia: Gap Between Promise and Actual Performance. https://www.academia.edu/75137800/FreeandCompulsoryPrimaryEducationPolicyinLiberiaGapBetweenPromiseandActual_Performance
 18. Wodon, Q. T., Montenegro, C. E., Nguyen, H., & Onagoruwa, A. O. (2018). Missed opportunities: The high cost of not educating girls. *MINISTERIO de EDUCACIÓN*, 1–64.